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ABSTRACT

To help improve formal journalism education in Nigeria, a study asked 165 editors at Nigeria's 32 major papers to compare journalists with and without degrees on issues relating to knowledge, competency, and personal attributes needed to work on the newspaper. It was hypothesized that editors with college degrees would rate journalists holding degrees higher than they would nondegree holding journalists. Analyses of questionnaires returned by 116 editors (a 70.3% return rate) and personal interviews revealed statistically significant differences between the ratings of editors with and without college degrees on 12 items. However, both groups of editors agreed that degree holding journalists were most knowledgeable and better skilled than nondegree holding journalists about the structure and processes of Nigeria, about the proper use of tools of expression, and the use of initiative. The degree holding editors were evenly split in their ratings of the knowledge of newspaper economics possessed by the two groups of journalists; however, the editors without degrees overwhelmingly rated nondegree holding journalists more highly than did those with degrees. Findings also showed that both groups of editors felt nondegree holding journalists to be more knowledgeable and better skilled than degree holding journalists in their (1) knowledge of press laws, (2) ability to design and lay out newspaper pages, and (3) display of dependability. Overall, findings suggested that mass communication departments need to pay more attention to newspaper economics, press laws, design and layout of newspapers, editing and headline writing, and typing. (JD)

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JOURNALISM EDUCATION AND NEWSPAPER WORK IN NIGERIA

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Presented to the International Division, annual convention, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, Tx., August 2, 1987.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to help improve formal journalism education in Nigeria. Selected Nigerian newspaper editors were asked to compare degree with non-degree holding journalists on the knowledge, competency and personal quality attributes needed to work in the newspapers.

The comparison indicated the strengths and weaknesses of the formal journalism curricula.

Recommendations included introduction of internships for journalism students and inclusion of practicing journalists and lawyers as part of the teaching staff.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to help improve formal journalism education in Nigeria. Selected Nigerian newspaper editors were asked to compare degree with non-degree holding journalists on the knowledge, competency and personal quality attributes needed to work in the newspapers.

Two survey instruments were used to gather the data: a 46 item questionnaire and personal interviews with 20 editors. The population of the study was classified into two groups: degree and non-degree holding editors.

It was hypothesized that editors with college degrees would rate degree holding journalists higher than non-degree holding journalists.

Statistically significant differences between the ratings of degree and non-degree holding editors were found in 12 items. Both groups of editors agreed that degree holding journalists were more knowledgeable or better skilled than non-degree holding journalists in five of the 12 items including knowledge of the structure and processes of Nigeria, ability to use tools of expression properly, and possession of initiative. The degree holding editors were evenly split on their ratings in the knowledge of newspaper economics but their non-degree counterparts overwhelmingly chose non-degree holding journalists.

Both groups of editors agreed that non-degree holding journalists were more knowledgeable or better skilled than degree holding journalists in six items including knowledge of the press laws, ability to design and layout newspaper pages, and display of dependability.

Recommendations included introduction of internships for journalism students and inclusion of practicing journalists and lawyers as part of the teaching staff.

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JOURNALISM EDUCATION AND NEWSPAPER WORK IN NIGERIA

The purpose of this study was to help improve formal journalism education in Nigeria. The study was designed to get the opinions of selected practicing newspaper editors in Nigeria on the value of formal journalism education for individuals involved in newspaper work. It was believed that the editors' evaluation would indicate the strengths and weaknesses of the formal journalism curricula.

Specifically, the study tried to answer the question: how do newspaper editors in Nigeria compare degree holding to non-degree holding journalists in terms of the knowledge, competency and personal quality attributes needed to work in the newspapers?

Background

Critics of journalism education at the college level claim that on-the-job training is the most efficient method for producing competent journalists. Supporters maintain that the hit and miss system of apprenticeship cannot be relied upon to meet the increased demand and sophistication of the modern world.

A former United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Director of Journalism Training, E. Lloyd Sommerland sees no difference of opinion on the need for general education and technical training for journalists. He acknowledges, however, the controversy over the method to use.[1] He is convinced that modern journalists need "the broad educational background and maturity of a university graduate."[2]

For many years, Nigeria adopted the erstwhile British practice of on-the-job training as the only and suitable method for producting journalists. In 1978, however, Ralph A. Akinfeleye of the University of Lagos observed that all journalism training programs in the country were reporting large numbers of applications.[3] Also in 1978, Frank Ugboajah of the University of Lagos discovered that university training was an important prerequisite for entry into key media positions.[4] He found a trend towards more formal training as compared with the previous emphasis on apprenticeship training.
In 1980, Nwanne Mgbemena found that 30.6 percent of Nigerian journalists had university degrees.[5]

Journalism education at the university level offers students the opportunity to develop the basic skills needed to practice journalism. At the same time, the students are exposed to other academic subjects that will enable them to apply their journalistic skills in ways that show more than the common knowledge of the subject matter.

May Katzen notes that the trend of attaching mass media training programs to African universities is an indication of the growing awareness that mass communicators must be exposed to a broad educational curriculum:

> If national mass media systems are to meet national needs and become the effective instruments of social change that they are expected to be, future media professionals must be given more than technical training...their education should ideally provide them with administrative, managerial and financial skills and above all, with the ability to assess critically the limitations and advantages of mass communication in setting and in implementing societal goals.[6]

Formal journalism education started in Nigeria in 1960 at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The program was modeled after an American journalism school. It later changed to a mass communication program. In 1967, the University of Lagos started a Department of Mass Communication. Both Nsukka and Lagos offer bachelor's and master's degrees in mass communication.

Twenty four institutions now offer mass communication courses in Nigeria. The paper makes a distinction between the academic emphasis of formal journalism education as obtained in the universities and the technical emphasis of associate degree programs of colleges of technology, polytechnics and the Nigerian Institute of Journalism.

The Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu; the College of Technology, Calabar; the Federal Polytechnic, Kaduna; and the Ogun State Polytechnic, Abeokuta offer three-year associate degree programs in mass communication. The other polytechnics and colleges of technology offer two-year associate degree programs. The Nigerian Institute of Journalism, Lagos has programs ranging from three months of specialized training to the two-year associate degree program.

Some of the associate degree programs are short in duration, narrow in scope, and technical with more emphasis on typing, shorthand and equipment handling. A former director of the Nigerian Institute of Journalism, John Lahey, described the institute's program as "more technical...in approach than academic."[7]

The traditional on-the-job training for Nigerian journalists is no longer seen as adequate. Sylvanus A. Ekwelie of the University of Nigeria sees a clear need for formal education in the techniques and ethics of information gathering and presentation. He believes that the old practice of learning on-the-job and rising from the ranks is "demonstrably inadequate for the rigors of the new information order required in nation-building."[8] A journalist and former President of Nigeria, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, believes that graduate journalists can become instruments of change in Nigeria through their professional competence.

> An ill-educated journalist is a liability to the press and to the nation; but a professionally trained journalist who is armed with a background of sound university education...will transform the practice of journalism into an asset to the credit of our nation.[9]

The expressed need for graduate journalists is, however, tainted by controversy over the value and content of formal journalism education. In 1980, Nwanne Mgbemena found little agreement among journalism practitioners on whether the training should be acquired in the university or elsewhere. There was also no consensus on the content of such a training program.[10]

Hypotheses

The research was designed to test the notion that the educational levels of the newspaper editors would greatly influence their ratings of the attributes of Nigerian journalists. Specifically, the following hypotheses were tested:

H1: Newspaper editors with college degrees would rate the knowledge attributes of Nigerian journalists differently than editors without college degrees.

H2: Newspaper editors with college degrees would rate the competency attributes of Nigerian journalists differently than editors without college degrees.

H3: Newspaper editors with college degrees would rate the possession of characteristics essential to job performance differently than editors without college degrees.

Significance of study

Editors with college degrees were expected to rate younger colleagues with similar academic backgrounds higher than their on-the-job trained counterparts. If, however, on-the-job trained editors rated graduate journalists higher as well, it would constitute a significant finding because by so doing they would have overcome the traditional notion of favoring "those who were trained like me." It would also be interpreted as a strong argument for academic programs in journalism. In addition, if editors with degrees rated on-the-job trained journalists higher than their graduate colleagues on any of the attributes tested, it could indicate areas of weakness in the formal journalism curriculum.

Method

One hundred and sixty-five individuals holding editorial positions in Nigeria's 32 major newspapers comprised the population of the study. The survey research method was used. Questionnaires were mailed to the editors in May 1984. Two instruments were used to gather data for quantitative and qualitative analyses. For the statistical procedure, the study instrument was a 46 item self-administered questionnaire. Questions followed the format developed by Starck, Sabine and Schwartz in their 1976 survey of Iowa's daily newspaper editors and journalism educators on the most important attributes that a reporter should have.[11]

There were nine items for knowledge attributes: social, political and economic structure and processes of Nigeria; press responsibilities to the society; Nigeria's history; effects of mass media; newspaper economics; current events; journalism's traditions and history; press laws; and gate keeper functions. Eleven items were used for competency attributes: write simple and complex news clearly and interestingly; write feature stories clearly and interestingly; use tools of expression properly(spelling, grammar, punctuation); use research procedures important to the journalistic trade; interview; analyze and synthesize; meet deadlines; edit/write headlines, cutlines; type clean copy with reasonable speed; and adapt to technological developments. The personal quality attributes had ten items: curiosity; initiative; dependability; integrity; dedication to accuracy/precision; judgment; sense of fairness; desire to serve the public interest; commitment to the profession; and confidence/self assurance.

Some questions were added to obtain information about the editors' education, work experience and degree of exposure to degree holding and non-degree holding journalists they worked with.

Items of the questionnaire were categorized into four areas: (1). Demographics and the editors' work experiences; (2) Ratings on the knowledge attributes; (3) Ratings on the competency attributes; and (4) Ratings on the personal quality attributes.

For the qualitative procedure, personal interviews were conducted in June 1984 with 20 newspaper editors. Twelve of them were degree holders. Five editors from the two newspapers in Jos, Enugu and Benin City respectively were interviewed. Five editors from the seven newspapers in Lagos were also interviewed. Newspapers in Jos, Enugu, Benin City and Lagos were chosen because of their geographical representation of the country.

The purpose of those interviews was to enrich the survey data. The interviewees were asked four questions: (a) Is formal journalism education necessary for a newspaper career in Nigeria? (b) What changes would you recommend to the mass communication departments of the Nigerian universities? (c) If you were in charge of journalism curriculum at a university, which courses would you introduce or emphasize for journalism students? (d) How much do you know about what goes on in the classroom and how much contact do you have with the departments of mass communication?

For the statistical procedure, the editors' evaluations were compared using chi-square analysis. A value significant at the .05 level was used to reject the null hypotheses that ratings of journalistic attributes were independent of the degree status of Nigerian newspaper editors.

Limitations

No attempt was made to obtain a representative sample of the population studied. The researcher's decision was influenced by the experience of Nwanne Mgbemena during his study, "Nigerian Journalists: A Study of Their Demographic Characteristics and Professional Orientation." He wrote 23 media establishments in the country requesting lists of their news personnel in order to create a random sample. Only one establishment, The Nigerian Chronicle responded but insisted that its staff list was confidential.[12]

Second, the elimination of smaller newspapers biased the results towards the views of the editors of larger newspapers. But since the majority of journalism graduates would likely wish to work for the major newspapers because of better pay, prestige and location, data from such larger newspapers' editors would be more relevant to the country at large.

Results

One hundred and sixteen questionnaires were returned, a return rate of 70.3 percent. Two of the returned questionnaires were not usable because the respondents checked two boxes instead of one for some of the items.

Ratings of knowledge attributes:

Both groups of editors indicated that degree holding journalists were more knowledgeable in seven items: Nigeria's structure and processes; press responsibilities to the society; Nigeria's history; effects of the mass media; current events; journalism's traditions and history; and gatekeeper functions. The editors agreed that non-degree holding journalists were more knowledgeable in one item: press laws. They disagreed on one item: knowledge of newspaper economics.

Ratings on four items were found to be statistically significant. The items were: knowledge of Nigeria's structure and processes; Nigeria's history; newspaper economics; and press laws. For knowledge of the social, political and economic structure and processes of Nigeria, 82.7 percent of the degree holding and 61.3 percent of the non-degree holding editors chose degree holding journalists. For knowledge of Nigeria's history, 88.5 percent of the degree holding and 59.7 percent of their non-degree counterparts chose degree holding journalists.

While 50 percent of the degree holding editors believed degree holding journalists were more knowledgeable in newspaper economics, the same percentage preferred the non-degree holding journalists. While only 16.1 percent of the non-degree holding editors chose degree holding journalists, over 83 percent of them stated that non-degree holding journalists had more knowledge of newspaper economics.

Table 1

Ratings on knowledge of the press laws

Knowledge of press laws	Degree holding editors		Non-degree holding editors	
	No.	%	No.	%
Degree holding journalists	25	48.1	16	25.8
Non-degree holding	27	51.9	46	74.2
Total	52		62	

$X^2 = 5.2$, df = 1, $p<.023$

As shown in Table 1, 48.1 percent of the degree holding editors declared that degree holding journalists had more knowledge of the press laws while 51.9 percent indicated that non-degree holding journalists were more knowledgeable. While 25.8 percent of the non-degree holding editors believed degree holding journalists were more knowledgeable, 74.2 percent disclosed that non-degree holding journalists had more knowledge of the press laws.

Ratings of competency attributes:

Ratings on five of the 11 competency items were found to be statistically significant. The items were: ability to use tools of expression properly; analyze and synthesize news events; edit and write newspaper headlines; design and layout newspaper pages; and type. The editors agreed that degree holding journalists were better skilled in two.

For the ability to use tools of expression properly, 88.5 percent of the degree holding and 59.7 percent of the non-degree holding editors chose degree holding journalists. For the ability to analyze and synthesize news events, 84.6 percent of the degree holding and 56.5 percent of the non-degree holding editors chose degree holding journalists.

For the ability to edit/write headlines and cutlines, 28.8 percent of degree holding and only 8.1 percent of their non-degree holding counterparts chose degree holding journalists. On the ability to type clean copy with reasonable speed, 19.2 percent of degree holding and 3.2 percent of the non-degree holding editors chose journalists with university degrees.

As shown in Table 2, the editors agreed that non-degree holding journalists were better skilled to design and layout newspaper pages.

Table 2

Ratings on ability to design and layout newspaper pages

Ability to design and layout newspaper pages	Degree holding editors		Non-degree holding editors	
	No.	%	No.	%
Degree holding journalists	14	26.9	5	8.1
Non-degree holding	38	73.1	57	91.9
Total	52		62	

$X^2 = 5.9$, df = 1, $p<.015$

The only difference was in the degree of agreement. Only 26.9 percent of the degree holding editors declared that degree holding journalists were better skilled, while 73.1 percent of them chose non-degree holding journalists. While 8.1 percent of the non-degree holding editors stated that degree holding journalists were better skilled, 91.9 percent of them indicated that non-degree holding journalists were better skilled to design and layout newspaper pages.

Ratings on personal quality attributes:

Both groups of editors chose degree holding journalists on six items: initiative; curiosity; integrity; judgment; sense of fairness; and confidence/self assurance. The editors preferred non-degree holding journalists on four items: dependability; dedication to accuracy/precision; desire to serve the public interest; and commitment to the profession.

Ratings on three items: initiative; dependability; and commitment to the profession, were found to be statistically significant. For the possession of initiative, 84.6 percent of the degree holding and 59.7 percent of the non-degree holding editors chose degree holding journalists. For dependability, 28.8 percent of the editors with university degrees and only 8.1 percent of their non-degree counterparts chose degree holding journalists.

Table 3 shows that on commitment to the profession, 19.2 percent of the degree holding editors and only 1.6 percent of their non-degree holding counterparts chose degree holding journalists.

While 80.8 percent of the degree holding editors chose non-degree holding journalists, 98.4 percent of the non-degree holding editors indicated that non-degree holding journalists showed more commitment to the profession. This finding showed the highest degree of agreement on any item in the study.

Table 3

Ratings on commitment to the profession

	Degree holding editors		Non-degree holding editors	
Display of commitment to the profession	No.	%	No.	%
Degree holding journalists	10	19.2	1	1.6
Non-degree holding	42	80.8	61	98.4
Total	52		62	

$X^2 = 8.1$, df = 1, $p<.004$

Personal interviews:

For the qualitative part of the study, 19 of the 20 editors interviewed said that formal journalism education was needed for a newspaper career in Nigeria. One editor said:

> In our society, a news item may have meanings beyond itself. Many non-graduate journalists seem not to be aware of the full implications of the news that appear on the pages of the newspaper. A journalist with university education is better prepared to handle news to achieve the proper effects.

One degree holding editor was non-commital:

> While university education can enhance performance, native intelligence and experience can also insure excellence in journalistic practices.

On changes they would recommend to the mass communication departments, all the editors wanted students to have direct, practical and meaningful experiences with the newspapers while they are in school. Two editors said:

> I think that formal journalism education is too academic. I would emphasize practical aspects of the profession.

> I believe that there is no substitute for experience. Instead of spending all of the four years in the classroom, I would make arrangements for student-journalists to spend some time working in the newspapers.

A majority of the editors stated that journalists with university degrees did not show sufficient grasp of newspaper design and layout. They considered design and layout a critical aspect of the newspaper work. All the degree holding editors emphasized that the social sciences should be part of the elective courses for journalism students. The non-degree holding editors did not specify courses but they expressed the conviction that university education should broaden a journalist's knowledge base. All the editors recommended that journalism students master the Nigerian newspaper laws, given that the health and welfare of journalists could depend on the knowledge of the press laws.

On how much they knew or were in contact with the mass communication departments, the majority of the editors admitted they were not well informed about the activities of the departments. Some of them said that contacts with journalism educators were very informal.

Interpretation

The hypothesis that degree holding editors would rate degree holding journalists higher than their non-degree holding counterparts in knowledge attributes was proved in two items. The majority of the non-degree holding editors also agreed with their degree holding counterparts. This meant that, in the view of the editors, college education increased the general knowledge of degree holding journalists and enabled them to know more about the structure and processes of Nigeria, and Nigerian history.

For knowledge of newspaper economics, the hypothesis was neither disproved nor proved since the degree holding editors were evenly split in their ratings of degree holding journalists. The even split could be seen as a sign of uncertainty or admission that newspaper economics was a weak spot for degree holding journalists. This notion was reinforced by the overwhelming ratings (83.9 percent) of the non-degree holding editors who indicated that non-degree holding journalists were more knowledgeable in newspaper economics.

The hypothesis was disproved on knowledge of the press laws since only 48.1 percent of the degree holding editors chose degree holding journalists. Non-degree holders were perceived as being better informed about press laws by both groups of editors. This finding could be seen as an admission that the mass communication departments were not doing enough in this critical area of Nigerian journalism.

The hypothesis that degree holding editors would rate degree holding journalists higher than non-degree holding journalists on competency attributes was proved in two items: ability to use tools of expression properly, and ability to analyze and synthesize news events. It was, however, disproved on the ability to design and layout newspaper pages, and ability to type. By overwhelmingly choosing non-degree holding journalists on these three items, the degree holding editors seemed to indicate that there were loopholes in the practical aspects of the journalism curriculum.

The hypothesis that degree holding editors would rate degree holding journalists higher than non-degree holding journalists on personal quality attributes was proved in one of the three ratings found to be statistically significant. By agreeing with their degree holding counterparts, a majority of the non-degree holding editors seemed to indicate that university education made the difference in possession of initiative. The hypothesis was, however, disproved on dependability and display of commitment to the journalism profession. The choice of non-degree holding journalists on the items could indicate that non-degree holding journalists did nothing to jeopardize their jobs. The fact that they had limited choices in the labor market could be responsible for their dependability and commitment.

By suggesting, during the interviews, that the practical aspects of the profession be emphasized, the editors indicated the weak spots of formal journalism education. Their responses tended to reinforce the statistical data which showed that degree holding journalists were in the practical aspects of the profession. The lack of contact between the classroom and field emphasized the gulf existing between journalism educators and practitioners in Nigeria.

Summary

The results of this research demonstrate that, in the opinions of Nigeria's newspaper editors, the competencies and abilities of degree and non-degree holding journalists can be compared in two areas: those in which the university graduates are better prepared and those in which non-graduates perform better. According to this study, the mass communication departments need to pay attention to these knowledge and skills areas: newspaper economics; press laws; design and layout of newspaper pages; editing and headline writing; and typing.

Recommendations

The domination of the journalism profession in Nigeria by non-degree holders compels degree holding journalists to demonstrate that formal journalism education is a better method for producing competent journalists. To do that, degree holding journalists have to perform creditably outside the classroom.

The mass communication departments of Nigeria's universities should be aware of the needs and developments in the field to enable them to impart to student-journalists the knowledge and practices that will support their professional skills. They should strike a balance between theory and practice in order to prevent charges that their curricula are not attuned to the needs of the profession.

Analysis of the data leads to the following recommendations:

1. There is need to introduce internships for journalism students to provide realistic experience that will compliment theoretical classroom work. Internships should also supplement the experience campus newspapers provide. Student-journalists should work in various newspapers as part of their graduation requirements. The mass communication departments should help their students to secure internships.

2. To improve the classroom/field relationship, newspaper editors should visit the campuses more frequently. Seminars should also be instituted to enable practitioners, journalism educators and students to review and exchange ideas on issues facing the profession.

3. Working journalists and lawyers should be part of the teaching staff in media and the law courses in order to present the practical aspects of this vital issue in Nigerian journalism.

Notes

1. E. Lloyd Sommerland, "Journalism Training For a Modern World," Professional Training For Mass Communications (Paris: UNESCO, 1963), 3.

2. Ibid., 9.

3. Ralph A. Akinfeleye, "Journalism Enrollments Lag Behind Demand In Nigeria," Journalism Educator 33 (1978): 33.

4. Frank O. Ugboajah, "Professionalization In the Nigerian Mass Media: A Study of Newspaper and Broadcast Editors," Media Asia 5 (1978): 108.

5. Nwanne N. Mgbemena, "Nigerian Journalists: A Study of Their Demographic Characteristics and Professional Orientation," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, August 1980), 104.

6. May Katzen, Mass Communication: Teaching and Studies At Universities (Paris: UNESCO Press, 1975), 261.

7. John Lahey quoted in Ralph A. Akinfeleye, "Journalism Enrollments Lag Behind Demand In Nigeria," op.cit.

8. Sylvanus A. Ekwelie, "National Development and Mass Communication Education: A Nigerian Profile," in L. E. Atwood Stuart J. Bullion and Sharon M. Murphy, eds., International Perspective On News (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 160.

9. Nnamdi Azikiwe, "Pioneer Heroes of the Nigerian Press," (An address at Nsukka in honor of the first journalism graduates of the University of Nigeria, May 31, 1964), 7.

10. Nwanne Mgbemena, "Nigerian Journalists: A Study of Their Demographic Characteristics and Professional Orientation," op.cit., 102.

11. Kenneth Starck, Gordon Sabine, and J. W. Schwartz, "Educators, Editors Compare Notes," Journalism Educator 31 (April, 1976): 52 - 54.

12. Nwanne Mgbemena, op.cit., 37